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ILLUSTRATED PENNY TALES.

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No. 2.—CONTAINING :—

MAKING AN ANGEL	By J. Harwood Panting.
THE VOICE OF SCIENCE By A. Conan Doyle.
THE SPIDER'S WEB By Jacques Normand.

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Illustrated Penny Tales.

Making an Angel.

By J. Harwood Panting.

GROTESQUE—yes, that is the word for the gathering. An ogre cannot always enjoy the regal society of a king; nor can it be said that the features of Hodge are usually to be seen glancing, with grinning condescension, upon a grave Prime Minister. There were other anomalies, too numerous to mention, in the room; for this was one of the workshops of the curious Kingdom of Make-Believe, of which, at the present time, if we may except the aforesaid company, John Farley was the solitary occupant.

John Farley, nicknamed "Daubs," was scene-painter of the Comedy Theatre, Porchester, and this was the room whence proceeded those marvellous designs that stirred the gallery to enthusiastic applause, the boxes to derisive laughter.

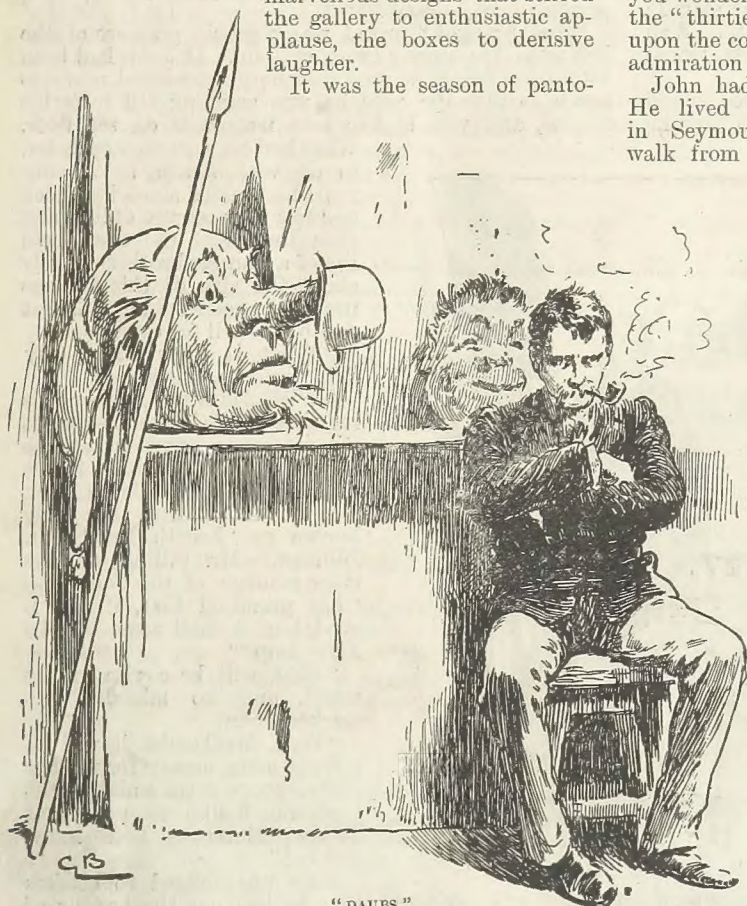
It was the season of panto-

too, was presumably resting from *his* labours, for he was sitting upon a wooden stool, smoking vigorously, and gazing, with a far-away glance, into the region of Nowhere. It was not a satisfied expression, this of John Farley's—no, decidedly not. It appeared to have a quarrel with the world, but did not seem to know precisely at which quarter of it to commence hostilities. Truth to tell, he was a disappointed man. He had started life, as many another, with high aims and ambitions, and they had brought him no better fruit than scene-painter to the Porchester Theatre, with, instead of academic diplomas and honours, the unflattering title of "Daubs!" Do you wonder, then, that sitting there, a man verging upon the "thirties," he looked upon life with little love, and upon the constituents of its big constituency with little admiration?

John had a private grievance as well as a public. He lived in a flat of a block of houses, situate in Seymour Street, about a quarter of an hour's walk from the theatre. For some days past he had determined on making another bid for fame and fortune by painting a grand picture. He had commenced various designs for this "masterpiece," but none of them had proved entirely satisfactory. And now, as though to frustrate all his hopes, a new source of disturbance had arisen. John possessed one of those mercurial, nervous temperaments, born principally of a morbid, solitary life, which demanded absolute quiet for any profitable employment of the intellect. For this reason he detested the atmosphere of a theatre, and for this reason he yet more detested the fate that had cast his fortunes in its midst. In the apartments where he lived, mean as they were, he usually found tranquillity. He could at least think, smoke, sketch, or write, as the fit took him, without disturbance. But now, just at the time when he most desired and needed quiet, the bugbear he fled had attacked him in his very stronghold.

In the rooms beneath those he occupied lived a poor widow with her two children—a boy and a girl. John knew this much from the landlady. He knew, too, that the boy was employed at the Comedy Theatre. Further than this he had not cared to inquire. Usually they were as quiet as the proverbial mouse, but latterly John's ears had been afflicted with groans and cries of pain, proceeding

from the widow's apartments, and kept up with aggravating regularity throughout the night. They were the cries of a child—no doubt about that—and a child in great suffering. A person less centred in his own projects than John might have at least felt



"DAUBS."

mime. The curtain had been rung down upon the "grand phantasmagorical, allegorical, and whimsicorical" legend of "King Pippin," and the denizens of that monarch's court—or, rather, their faces—were resting peacefully from their labours on the wall. John Farley,



some sympathy with the sufferer, but John had evidently lost kinship with the deeper emotions, and instead of sympathy he experienced only a feeling of annoyance and keen resentment against the widow and "her brats," as he styled them. Thus it was that, think as he would, the subject of this grand picture which was to take the world by storm and out-Raphael Raphael, persisted in evading him; and thus it is we find him, in a more cynical mood than usual, at the Comedy Theatre, in no haste to return to the scene of his failures.

"What is the use of striving?" mused John, as he slowly puffed his pipe. "One might as well throw up the sponge. Fate is too much for me. He follows at my elbow everywhere. His usual running-ground is not enough for him. Now he follows me home, and gives me a solo of his own peculiar music through one of his imps."

A timid knock sounded upon the door. John was busy with his thoughts, and did not hear it.

"That theory of Longfellow's is correct—art is long. In what sphere could you find a longer? Supportable might this be, but cold indifference to a poor devil aching for a gleam of sympathy is insupportable."

The knock at the door was repeated, but with the same effect as before.

"The grinning public—just tickle its side: that is all it needs. He who caters most to its stupidity in life is he who gains the proud distinction of a public mausoleum at his death. I have not got quite into the way, but still I see in perspective a monument dedicated to—'Daubs.'"

A sound, light as gossamer wing, was heard in the room. John Farley turned his head. Then he stared; then he rubbed his eyes; then he stared again. Well he might. Was this an offspring of the immortal whom he had just been apostrophizing?

It was decidedly an imp—at least it had the apparel of one. It was clothed in scarlet; dependent from its

recognised his uncanny visitor. It was the little son of the widow who lived under his flat. He was one of the imps of King Pippin's kingdom in the pantomime, and doomed for a small pittance to indulge his apish tricks nightly with the gnomes and fairies of that fanciful realm.

"Daubs!" said the imp.

Yes, only that was necessary to incite John's wrath. A nickname that was supportable from the actors and scene-shifters was insupportable from a child.

"Daubs" therefore turned sharply upon the boy:—

"Are you referring to me?"

"Yes, sir."

John was on the point of brusquely informing the lad that he was not acquainted with a gentleman of the name of Daubs, and peremptorily showing him the door. A glance from the honest brown eyes, however, restrained him. It told him that what he had at first assumed to be impudence was really the result of ignorance—that, and only that.

"I would like to know you, Mr. Daubs. You don't mind knowing a little boy—do you?"

John opened his eyes in astonishment. What a curious imp! John was not aware that anybody had any particular desire for his society; in fact, the reverse had hitherto seemed the case. He was usually regarded as an unsociable being.

"I have not the least objection to making your acquaintance," said he, *unreluctantly*, it must be confessed.

"Oh, thank you," said the little fellow, drawing nearer, and putting his hand confidently in John's, and looking up at him with bright, happy eyes. "Then perhaps I may—may I?"

What "may I" meant was a gentle pressure of the lips upon the smoky cheek of John. If John had been astonished before he was still more astonished now—so much so that the pipe he was smoking fell from his fingers, and was broken into fragments on the floor.

What had he, a grumpy bachelor, to do with kissing? Twenty years had passed since his cheek had felt the pressure of lips, and then they were the death-cold lips of a younger brother—surely about the size of this strange imp—who had left him with that dumb farewell for ever.

"What is your name, my lad?" said he, softly.

"Willie Maxwell. Mother calls me 'her Willie.' Dodo—that is my sister, you know—when she is well" (here the little fellow sighed) "says that I'm her pet. But at the theatre I'm only known as 'Fourth Imp.' Mr. Billings"—Mr. Billings was the stage-manager of the Comedy—"has promised that, if I'm a good boy, I shall some day be First Imp!"

"That will be a rise in the world, and no mistake," remarked John.

"Well, Mr. Daubs, it will be a little more money for mother—threepence extra a night—but I shouldn't like to push out Teddy Morris. You know Teddy?"

John was obliged to confess that he had not the honour of that young gentleman's acquaintance. He never troubled himself with anything or anybody outside his own department.

"Teddy Morris is First Imp. He doesn't like me, you know, because he thinks I'm—what do you call it, Mr. Daubs?"



"IT WAS AN IMP."

haunches was a tail; on its head a Satanic cowl. But there was melancholy rather than mischief in its eye, and it was of a restful, confiding brown rather than an unrestful, flashing black.

John again inserted his knuckles in his eyes, and waved off the smoke from his pipe. And then he

"Ambitious?"

"Yes, 'bitious, that's the word."

John's crusty humour was gradually melting, and he smiled—first, at anyone disliking this frank, affectionate boy; next at the rivalry of the imps. "All the world," thought he, "is indeed a stage, and the struggle for a position on it extends to strange quarters."

"But I'm not 'bitious, Mr. Daubs"—here Willie paused, and deliberately climbed on John's knee—"no, I really ain't, 'cept of you!"

John started at this bold confession. He was on the point of exploding into loud laughter, but the brown eyes were looking earnestly into his, and with these searching witnesses before him John thought that such an ebullition of mirth would be little short of profanation.

"Oh, you're ambitious of me, are you? Well, my little man, if it's your intention to supplant me as scene-painter to the Comedy Theatre, I'm exceedingly grateful to you for giving me due notice of the fact. Only let me know when you think I ought to resign my position, won't you?"

"Yes," assented Willie, with childish *naïveté*; and then, putting his head nearer to John's, as though to take him into still closer confidence—"Do you know, I've often seen you, and wanted to speak to you, but somehow I've not liked to. I've watched you when you weren't looking, and you've always seemed to look like—you don't mind a little boy saying it, Mr. Daubs?—like that." Willie pointed to a mask of one of the ogres. John did not think the comparison very flattering, and felt very uncomfortable. The next instant the child was nestling closer to him; a pair of thin arms were clasped tightly round John's neck; and the lips which again pressed his whispered softly: "But you're not a bit like that now, Mr. Daubs."

Then the comparison was forgiven, but not forgotten.

"Tell me, Willie, why you are ambitious of me." "Ambitious of me," John mentally added, "who thought myself the least envied mortal in the world!"

Willie's only answer was to take John's big hand into his small one; then he instituted a minute comparison between the two; then he patted it fondly; then he dropped it suddenly, and remained buried in deep thought. John gave himself up to the child's whim. It was a delicious experience—the more delicious because unexpected. This was an infantile world, made up of quaint ideas and actions, of which even the memory had been almost obliterated from his mind. Thought took him back to its last link—that which had been rudely snapped by the death of his brother. He sighed, and the sigh was echoed.

"It will be a long while—many years, I suppose, Mr. Daubs—before my hand gets like yours?"

Mr. Daubs thought it would be. Willie sighed again. "Painting's very hard, sir—ain't it?"

"Oh, no, my boy: it's the easiest thing in the world," said the artist, bitterly; "and the world accepts it at its right value, for it is never inclined to pay very dearly for it. Just a few paints, a brush, and there you are."

"Well, Mr. Daubs, I hardly think that's quite right—you don't mind my saying so, do you?—'cause I saved up a shilling and bought a paint-brush and some paints, and tried ever so hard to make a picture, but it was no use. No, it was nothing like a picture—all smudge, you know—so I thought that p'raps God never meant little boys should make pictures, and that I would have to wait till I grew up like you, Mr. Daubs."

"It's as well somebody should think I can paint pictures; but do you know, my young art critic, that many persons have

no higher estimate of my efforts than you have of yours—that is to say," seeing the eyes widening in astonishment, "their term for them is 'smudge!'"

"No, do they say that? No, Mr. Daubs, they wouldn't dare," said Willie, indignantly. "Why, you paint lovely horses, and flowers, and trees, and mountains; and your birds, if they could only sing, like the little bird Dodo once had, they would seem quite alive."

John had never had so flattering, nor so unique a criticism of his art. "Molière," thought he, "used to read his plays to the children, and gather something from their prattle. Why should I disdain opinion from a like source, especially as it chimes in so beautifully with what my vanity would have had me acknowledge long since?"

"Well, youngster, admitting that I am the fine artist you would make of me, what then? In what way do you expect to convert a world which prefers real horses, real trees, and real birds? See, now, even here—at the Comedy Theatre—we have only to announce on the playbills that a *real* horse, a *real* steam-engine, or a *real* goose or donkey, for that matter, will be exhibited, and the best efforts of my artistic genius are thrown into the shade. You are a case in point. Could I draw an imp that would meet with half the success that you do? But what nonsense I am talking—you don't understand a word of it."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Daubs, I do—something. Do you know what I think?"

"Say on, youngster."

"I think we don't often know or think what is best for us. Mother says little boys don't always know what is best for them. 'Real' is a live thing—ain't it? I used to *think*, Mr. Daubs, you were a real live ogre once. But now I know you ain't—are you?" This with a pressure of the arms again round John's neck. What could the "real live ogre" say to such an appeal? After a pause: "Mr. Daubs, can I tell you something—may I?"

John assented, wondering what was the next strange thing this curious sprite would ask.

"And will you say 'yes' to what I ask?"

John again assented, though he thought that possibly his assent might necessitate a journey to Timbuctoo.

"Well, I want you to make me—an angel!" And



"PAINTING'S VERY HARD, SIR—AIN'T IT?"

then he quickly added, seeing the startled expression on John's face, "You are so clever!"

"An angel!"

"Yes, an angel. You won't say no?" There was a quiver of anxiety in the boy's tones. "It's for Dodo."

"For Dodo! But, child, I'm not a manufacturer of angels!"

"But you can draw birds. Birds have wings, and so have angels, and it's for Dodo," he again repeated.

The logic of Willie's reasoning was irrefutable. Where was John standing? He scarcely knew. He had caught the boy's conception. This, then, was the reason of his anxiety to become an artist. Never imp was surely such a scrap! The angel was for his sister. They were her moans and cries John had heard in his lonely chamber these three nights past, and it was with an angel her brother hoped, in his childish imagination, to bring relief from pain and suffering. With one quick flash of inspiration John saw it all—the intense longing, the all-embracing love, the unselfishness, the exquisite sense of bringing to suffering its one great alleviation. And as he thought, John's head dropped, and a tear fell on the eager, youthful face upturned to his.

"Mother says that all angels are in Heaven, and Dodo's always talking about angels. She says she wants to see one, and would like one to come to her. But they can't, Mr. Daubs, unless we first go to them. And I don't want—no, no, I don't want"—with a big sob—"Dodo—to—go—away. If I could take it to her she would stay here."

John's heart was full—full to overflowing. He could scarcely speak.

"Go—go, and change your clothes, youngster, and we will try to make you an angel."

"Oh, thank you so much."

In a flash Willie was gone, and John was left alone. "Heaven help me!" he said, with a tender, pathetic glance in the direction whence the little figure had vanished; "Heaven help me!" and John did what he had not done since his own brother died. He fell upon his knees, and sent a hasty prayer Heavenward for inspiration. Then he took a large piece of cardboard, and some crayons, and commenced—making an angel! He worked as one inspired. With nervous, skilful fingers he worked. All was silent in the great city below; the stillness lent inspiration to the artist's imagination. Never had he seemed in closer touch with Heaven. To give John his due, the petty contentions of men had always been beneath him, but the "peace which passeth understanding" had never been his, because of the selfishness by which his better nature had been warped. Now, through this child's unselfishness, he almost heard the flapping of angelic wings, and he depicted them, in all their softened beauty, upon his cardboard, with a face between that seemed to look out in ineffable love upon a guilt-laden world. This was what the artist wrought.

"Oh, Mr. Daubs!"

The exclamation was pregnant with meaning. Willie had returned, and was devouring with open mouth and eyes the sketch of the angel.

"Well, youngster, do you think that will do for Dodo?"

"And that's for Dodo?" was the only answer, for the boy was still absorbed in the artist's creation.

"Have you ever seen an angel, Mr. Daubs? Ah, you must have. I knew you were clever at horses, and trees, and birds, and skies, but I didn't guess you were so good at angels. It's just what mother said they were!"

"There, don't make me vain, but take it; and"—added John partly to himself—"may the King of Cherubim hold in reserve his messenger, not for a death-warrant, but a blessing!"

"Thank you, so much. But I'm going to pay you, you know." And Willie drew out proudly an old pocket-handkerchief, and, applying his teeth vigorously to a special corner of it, took therefrom a sixpence.

John smiled, but took the coin without a word. Then he lifted the boy up, and kissed him tenderly. The next moment he was alone: Willie had departed with his angel. The artist listened to the pattering footsteps as they descended the stairs, then bowed his head upon his arms, and what with his three nights of unrest, and thinking over what he had been and might have been, fell into a profound sleep.

Not long had he been in the land of counterpane, when of a sudden there was a stir from without.

The night air was quick with cries, and a childish treble seemed to echo and re-echo above them all. There was something familiar in this latter sound. It was as a harsh note on a diaphanous that had but recently brought him sweetest music.

In a moment John had gained the street. He had connected the cry with one object—Willie. That object had for him a value infinite, so quick in its power of attraction is the spark of sympathy when once kindled. John's view of life had seemed, in this last half-hour, to have greatly widened. It took account of things previously unnoticed; it opened up feelings long dormant. His ear was strangely sensitive to the beat of this new pulse—so much so that a vague terror shaped itself out of that night-cry. It seemed to him to portend disaster.

But surely his worst fears are realized! What is that moving mass away in the distance? Soon John has reached the spot. He hears a hum of sympathy, and then there is a reverential silence: John's ears have caught the pitying accents of a bystander, "Poor lad! Heaven help him!"

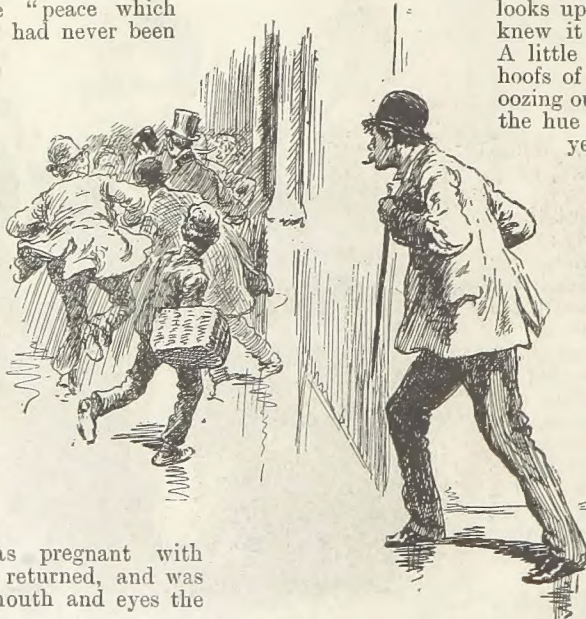
"Help him! Help whom?"

John's mind is quick at inference. He parts the crowd, and with certain glance looks upon its point of observation. He knew it: no need of words to tell him. A little form is there, mangled with the hoofs of a horse. Its life-blood is slowly oozing out on the pavement. The face has the hue of death—no mistaking that—and yet it has around it something of the halo of saintship. John gazes as one distraught. The face he sees, now pinched with the agonies of death, is that of Willie Maxwell!

"Good God, is it possible?"

But a brief moment or two since, it seemed to John, this poor boy was in the bloom of health, full of the radiant sunshine of life. Now the finger of Death had touched him, and he stood on the threshold of the Kingdom of Shadows.

For an instant John was ready to launch again his maledictions against Fate. The presence of this child had cast a ray of sunshine on a sunless



"WHAT IS THAT?"

existence—had given to it a brief gleam of happiness, which was flickering out in this tragic way on the roadside. John had so frequently taken a selfish estimate of life, that even in this supreme crisis that feeling was momentarily uppermost, but only momentarily. The child was resting in the arms of a rough carman, and as John looked a spasm of returning consciousness passed over the little sufferer's frame. Then there was a faint moan. Was there a chance of saving the boy's life? John came closer, and as he did so a light seemed to radiate from the child's face on to his.

Now the eyes are looking at him in a pained, dazed way. There is a gleam of recognition, and about the mouth flickers a smile of content.

"Mr. Da—Da—Daubs—I'm—so—glad—you've—come."

John kneels on the ground, and kisses the pale, cold lips of the sufferer. The little arms are nervously at work; then with an effort they are extended towards him: "Will you please take this, Mr. Daubs?"

John looked. It was the sketch of the angel! "I'm so glad I didn't drop it. I held it tight, you see, Mr. Daubs—oh, so tight! I was afraid Dodo wouldn't get it. No one knows Dodo, you see. I can't—take—it—to her—to-night; so—will you—please?"

John's tears are falling fast upon the pavement. He seems to hear the stifled sobs of the bystanders as he takes in his hand the sketch of the angel. "I shall—see her—again—when the—light comes. Now—it is—so dark—and cold—so cold!" John mechanically takes off his coat, and wraps it around the little form.

"Thank you—Mr. Daubs—you're—a—kind—gentleman. May I—may I?"—John had heard a similar request before that evening, and thanked God that he knew what it meant. He bent his face forward. "That for dear—*dear* mother, and that for—*darling*—sister—sister Dodo."

As John's lips received the death-cold kisses, a strange thing happened. The picture of the angel was suddenly wrested from his grasp, and flew upward and upward, in shape like a bat. There was a moment of mystery—of intense darkness and solemn silence. Then the heavens were agleam with sunshine, and John seemed to see radiant forms winging their way earthward. One of these outsped the rest. Nearer and nearer it came, and John in wonderment fixed his gaze intently thereon. He had never seen a real angel before, but he recognised this one. It was the angel he had sketched, transfigured into celestial life. It came to where the child rested, and John fell backward, dazzled with its light. When he looked up again the child and the angel had both vanished, and all was again dark.

"Daubs, Daubs! Wake up, wake up!"

John looked up with sleepy eyes. Where in the world was he? Not in any angelic presence, that was certain. The voice was not pitched in a very heavenly key, and wafted odours of tobacco and beer rather than frankincense and myrrh. John pinched himself to make sure he was awake. This was assuredly no celestial visitor, but Verges—that was his theatrical nickname—the Comedy Theatre watchman.

"Is it you, Verges? Will you have the kindness to tell me where I am?" John looked around him in bewilderment. The masks seemed grinning at him in an aggravating way.

"Well, you are at present, mister, in the Comedy Theatre; but you was just now very soundly in the land of Nod, I guess. You'd make a splendid watchman, you would."

Verges' denunciation came with beautiful appropriateness, as he had just come from the public-house opposite, where he had been indulging in sundry libations for this hour past at the expense of some of its customers.

"It is a dream, then—not a hideous reality? Thank God, thank God!"

"What's a dream?" said Verges, looking with some apprehension at John. When he saw that gentleman begin to caper round the room his fears were not lessened, for he thought that John had taken leave of some of his senses.

"Am I awake now, Verges?"

"Well, you look like it."

"You are certain?" and he put a shilling into Verges' hand.

"I never knew you to be more waker. You can keep on being as wide-awake as you please at the same price, mister!"

"Give me my hat and coat, Verges. Thank you," and John passed rapidly out at the door with a hasty "Good-night!" Verges looked after him with wide-mouthed astonishment; then he looked at the piece of money in his hand; then he tapped his forehead, and shook his head ominously, muttering, "Daubs is daft—clean daft!"

John would not trust his waking senses till he reached the corner of the street at which he had seen so vividly in his dream the incidents just recorded. A solitary policeman was walking up and down, and not so much as a vehicle was to be seen. And then another fear took possession of John. Was his dream a presentiment of danger, and had an accident befallen Willie in some other form?

He soon reached his lodgings, hurried up the staircase, and listened fearfully outside the widow's door. Nobody



"WAKE UP, WAKE UP!"

seemed astir, but he could see that a light was burning within. Should he knock? What right had he, a perfect stranger, to intrude at this unreasonable hour? He remembered, too, his bitter thoughts and words about the widow and her children—her “brats!” So he mounted reluctantly to his apartments. How the silence—previously so much desired—oppressed him! He would eagerly have welcomed at that moment a cry, a sob, or any sound of life from the room below. But the sufferer gave no token, and John, in turn, became the sufferer in the worst form of suffering—that of mental anguish.

He could stand it no longer. John determined, at any cost, to see whether or not Willie had returned in safety. So he descended, and knocked at Mrs. Maxwell's door.

“Come in,” said a quiet voice, and John opened the door. The first thing that met his gaze was his picture of the angel hanging at the head of a child's cot. Beneath it, calmly asleep, was Dodo—Willie's sister. A frail morsel of humanity she seemed, with pale, almost transparent, complexion—the paler by its contrasting framework of golden hair. Mrs. Maxwell was busily engaged at needlework. She hastily rose when she saw her visitor. “I thought it was Mrs. Baker” (Mrs. Baker was the landlady), she said. “She usually looks in the last thing.

“Pardon me for intruding, but I was anxious to know whether your son had arrived here in safety?

“Yes, oh, yes; some time since. Are you the gentleman who gave him the angel?

“Yes,” said John, simply.

“Thank you so much; you have made my little girl

so happy. Children have strange fancies in sickness, and she has been talking about nothing but angels for days past. See,” pointing to the sleeping child, “it is the first night she has slept soundly for a whole week.”

The holiest feeling John had ever experienced since he knelt as a child at his mother's knee passed over him. He had never before felt so thoroughly that a good action was its own reward.

“May I crave one great favour as a return for so trivial a service? Will you let me see your son?”

The widow immediately arose, took a lamp, and beckoned John to follow her into the next room.

There was little Willie fast asleep in his cot. His lips, even in his sleep, were wreathed in a happy smile, and as John bent and reverently kissed them, they murmured softly: “Mr. Daubs!”

When John again mounted to his chamber it was with a light heart. His evil angel—dissatisfaction—had gone out of him, and his good angel—contentment—reigned in its stead.

From that time forth he shared the widow's vigils; he was to her an elder son—to the children, a loving brother. His heart, too, expanded in sympathy for his fellows, and under this genial influence his energies, previously cramped, expanded also. The best proof I can give of this, if proof be necessary, is that the picture which he shortly afterwards exhibited, entitled “The Two Angels,” was the picture of the year, and brought to him the fame which had previously so persistently evaded him. One of the happiest moments in his life was when he took Dodo—now quite recovered—and Willie to view his “masterpiece.”



The Voice of Science.

By A. Conan Doyle.

MRS. ESDAILE, of The Lindens, Birchespool, was a lady of quite remarkable scientific attainments. As honorary secretary of the ladies' branch of the local Eclectic Society, she shone with a never-failing brilliance. It was even whispered that on the occasion of the delivery of Professor Tomlinson's suggestive lecture "On the Perigenesis of the Plastidule" she was the only woman in the room who could follow the lecturer even as far as the end of his title. In the seclusion of The Lindens she supported Darwin, laughed at Mivart, doubted Hæckel, and shook her head at Weissman, with a familiarity which made her the admiration of the University professors and the terror of the few students who ventured to cross her learned but hospitable threshold. Mrs. Esdaile had, of course, detractors. It is the privilege of exceptional merit. There were bitter feminine whispers as to the cramming from encyclopædias and text-books which preceded each learned meeting, and as to the care with which in her own house the conversation was artfully confined to those particular channels with which the hostess was familiar. Tales there were, too, of brilliant speeches written out in some masculine hand, which had been committed to memory by the ambitious lady, and had afterwards flashed out as extempore elucidations of some dark, half-explored corner of modern science. It was even said that these little blocks of information got jumbled up occasionally in their bearer's mind, so that after an entomological lecture she would burst into a geological harangue, or *vice-versâ*, to the great confusion of her audience. So ran the gossip of the malicious, but those who knew her best were agreed that she was a very charming and clever little person.

It would have been a strange thing had Mrs. Esdaile not been popular among local scientists, for her pretty house, her charming grounds, and all the hospitality which an income of two thousand a year will admit of, were always at their command. On her pleasant lawns in the summer, and round her drawing-room fire in the winter, there was much high talk of microbes, and leucocytes, and sterilized bacteria, where thin, ascetic materialists from the University upheld the importance of this life against round, comfortable champions of orthodoxy from the Cathedral Close. And in the heat of thrust and parry, when scientific proof ran full tilt against inflexible faith, a word from the clever widow, or an opportune rattle over the keys by her pretty daughter Rose, would bring all back to harmony once more.

Rose Esdaile had just passed her twentieth year, and was looked upon as one of the beauties of Birchespool. Her face was perhaps a trifle long for perfect symmetry, but her eyes were

fine, her expression kindly, and her complexion beautiful. It was an open secret, too, that she had under her father's will five hundred a year in her own right. With such advantages a far plainer girl than Rose Esdaile might create a stir in the society of a provincial town.

A scientific *conversazione* in a private house is an onerous thing to organize, yet mother and daughter had not shrunk from the task. On the morning of which I write, they sat together surveying their accomplished labours, with the pleasant feeling that nothing remained to be done save to receive the congratulations of their friends. With the assistance of Rupert, the son of the house, they had assembled from all parts of Birchespool objects of scientific interest, which now adorned the long table in the drawing-room. Indeed, the full tide of curiosities of every sort which had swelled into the house had overflowed the rooms devoted to the meeting, and had surged down the broad stairs to invade the dining-room and the passage. The whole villa had become a museum. Specimens of the flora and fauna of the Philippine Islands, a ten-foot turtle carapace from the Galapagos, the os frontis of the *Bos montis* as shot by Captain Charles Beesly in the Tibetan Himalayas, the bacillus of Koch cultivated on gelatine—these and a thousand other such trophies adorned the tables upon which the two ladies gazed that morning.

"You've really managed it splendidly, ma," said the young lady, craning her neck up to give her mother a congratulatory kiss. "It was so brave of you to undertake it."

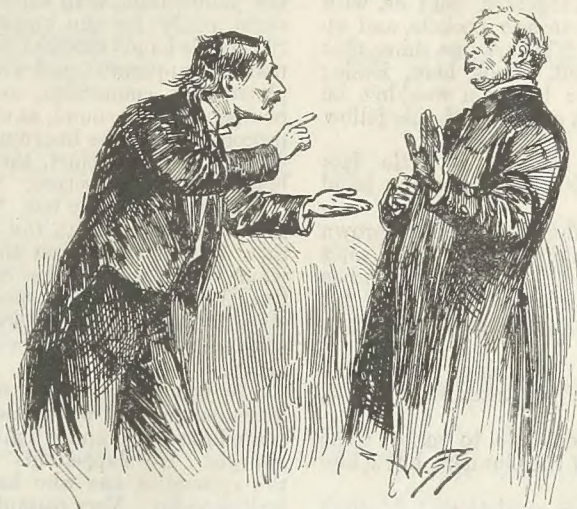
"I think that it will do," purred Mrs. Esdaile, complacently. "But I do hope that the phonograph will work without a hitch. You know at the last meeting of the British Association I got Professor Standerton to repeat into it his remarks on the life history of the Medusiform Gonophore."

"How funny it seems," exclaimed Rose, glancing at the square, box-like apparatus, which stood in the post of honour on the central table, "to think that this wood and metal will begin to speak just like a human being."

"Hardly that, dear. Of course, the poor thing can say nothing except what is said to it. You always know exactly what is coming. But I do hope that it will work all right."

"Rupert will see to it when he comes up from the garden. He understands all about them. Oh, ma, I feel so nervous."

Mrs. Esdaile looked anxiously down at her daughter, and passed her hand caressingly over her rich brown hair. "I understand," she said, in her soothing, cooing voice, "I understand."



"SCIENTIFIC PROOF."

"He will expect an answer to-night, ma."

"Follow your heart, child. I am sure that I have every confidence in your good sense and discretion. I would not dictate to you upon such a matter."

"You are so good, ma. Of course, as Rupert says, we really know very little of Charles—of Captain Beesly. But then, ma, all that we do know is in his favour."

"Quite so, dear. He is musical, and well informed, and good-humoured, and certainly extremely handsome. It is clear, too, from what he says, that he has moved in the very highest circles."

"The best in India, ma. He was an intimate friend of the Governor-General's. You heard yourself what he said yesterday about the D'Arcies, and Lady Gwendoline Fairfax, and Lord Montague Grosvenor."

"Well, dear," said Mrs. Esdaile, resignedly, "you are old enough to know your own mind. I shall not attempt to dictate to you. I own that my own hopes were set upon Professor Stares."

"Oh, ma, think how dreadfully ugly he is!"

"But think of his reputation, dear. Little more than thirty, and a member of the Royal Society."

"I couldn't, ma. I don't think I could if there was not another man in the world. But, oh, I do feel so nervous; for you can't think how earnest he is. I must give him an answer to-night. But they will be here in an hour. Don't you think that we had better go to our rooms?"

The two ladies had risen, when there came a quick, masculine step upon the stairs, and a brisk young fellow with curly black hair dashed into the room.

"All ready?" he asked, running his eyes over the relic-strewn tables.

"All ready, dear," answered his mother.

"Oh, I am glad to catch you together," said he, with his hands buried deeply in his trouser pockets, and an uneasy expression on his face. "There's one thing that I wanted to speak to you about. Look here, Rosie; a bit of fun is all very well; but you wouldn't be such a little donkey as to think seriously of this fellow Beesly?"

"My dear Rupert, do try and be a little less abrupt," said Mrs. Esdaile, with a deprecating hand outstretched.

"I can't help seeing how they have been thrown together. I don't want to be unkind, Rosie; but I can't stand by and see you wreck your life for a man who has nothing to recommend him but his eyes and his moustache. Do be a sensible girl, Rosie, and have nothing to say to him."

"It is surely a point, Rupert, upon which I am more fitted to decide than you can be," remarked Mrs. Esdaile, with dignity.

"No, mater, for I have been able to make some inquiries. Young Cheffington, of the Gunners, knew him in India. He says——"

But his sister broke in upon his revelations. "I won't

stay here, ma, to hear him slandered behind his back," she cried, with spirit. "He has never said anything that was not kind of you, Rupert, and I don't know why you should attack him so. It is cruel, unbrotherly!" With a sweep and a whisk she was at the door, her cheek flushed, her eyes sparkling, her bosom heaving with this



"I WON'T STAY HERE TO HEAR HIM SLANDERED."

little spurt of indignation, while close at her heels walked her mother with soothing words, and an angry glance thrown back over her shoulder. Rupert Esdaile stood with his hands burrowing deeper and deeper into his pockets, and his shoulders rising higher and higher to his ears, feeling intensely guilty, and yet not certain whether he should blame himself for having said too much or for not having said enough.

Just in front of him stood the table on which the phonograph, with wires, batteries, and all complete, stood ready for the guests whom it was to amuse. Slowly his hands emerged from his pockets as his eye fell upon the apparatus, and with languid curiosity he completed the connection, and started the machine. A pompous, husky sound, as of a man clearing his throat, proceeded from the instrument, and then in high, piping tones, thin but distinct, the commencement of the celebrated scientist's lecture. "Of all the interesting problems," remarked the box, "which are offered to us by recent researches into the lower orders of marine life, there is none to exceed the retrograde metamorphosis which characterizes the common barnacle. The differentiation of an amorphous protoplasmic mass——" Here Rupert Esdaile broke the connection again, and the funny little tinkling voice ceased as suddenly as it began.

The young man stood smiling, looking down at this garrulous piece of wood and metal, when suddenly the smile broadened, and a light of mischief danced up into his eyes. He slapped his thigh, and danced round in the ecstasy of one who has stumbled on a brand-new brilliant idea. Very carefully he drew forth the slips of

metal which recorded the learned Professor's remarks, and laid them aside for future use. Into the slots he thrust virgin plates, all ready to receive an impression and then, bearing the phonograph under his arm, he vanished into his own sanctum. Five minutes before the first guests had arrived the machine was back upon the table, and all ready for use.

There could be no question of the success of Mrs. Esdaile's conversazione. From first to last everything went admirably. People stared through microscopes, and linked hands for electric shocks, and marvelled at the Galapagos turtle, the os frontis of the Bos mont's, and all the other curiosities which Mrs. Esdaile had taken such pains to collect. Groups formed and chatted round the various cases. The Dean of Birchespool listened with a protesting lip, while Professor Maunders held forth upon a square of triassic rock, with side-

don't go. I can't bear to be away from you. I had heard of love, Rose; but how strange it seems that I, after spending my life amid all that is sparkling and gay, should only find out now, in this little provincial town, what love really is!"

"You say so; but it is only a passing fancy."

"No, indeed. I shall never leave you, Rose—never, unless you drive me away from your side. And you would not be so cruel—you would not break my heart?"

He had very plaintive, blue eyes, and there was such a depth of sorrow in them as he spoke that Rose could have wept for sympathy.

"I should be very sorry to cause you grief in any way," she said, in a faltering tone.

"Then promise——"

"No, no; we cannot speak of it just now, and they are collecting round the phonograph. Do come and



"Call me Charles. Do now."

thrusts occasionally at the six days of orthodox creation; a knot of specialists disputed over a stuffed ornithorhynchus in a corner; while Mrs. Esdaile swept from group to group, introducing congratulating, laughing, with the ready, graceful tact of a clever woman of the world. By the window sat the heavily-moustached Captain Beesly, with the daughter of the house, and they discussed a problem of their own, as old as the triassic rock, and perhaps as little understood.

"But I must really go and help my mother to enter tain, Captain Beesly," said Rose at last, with a little movement as if to rise.

"Don't go, Rose. And don't call me Captain Beesly call me Charles. Do, now!"

"Well, then—Charles."

"How pretty it sounds from your lips! No, now,

listen to it. It is so funny. Have you ever heard one?"

"Never."

"It will amuse you immensely. And I am sure that you would never guess what it is going to talk about."

"What, then?"

"Oh, I won't tell you. You shall hear. Let us have these chairs by the open door; it is so nice and cool."

The company had formed an expectant circle round the instrument. There was a subdued hush as Rupert Esdaile made the connection, while his mother waved her white hand slowly from left to right to mark the cadence of the sonorous address which was to break upon their ears.

"How about Lucy Araminta Pennyfeather?" cried a squeaky little voice. There was a rustle and a titter among the audience. Rupert glanced across at Captain



"WHO WAS IT WHO HID THE ACE?"

Beesly. He saw a drooping jaw, two protruding eyes, and a face the colour of cheese.

"How about little Martha Hovedean of the Kensal Choir Union?" cried the piping voice.

Louder still rose the titters. Mrs. Esdaile stared about her in bewilderment. Rose burst out laughing, and the Captain's jaw drooped lower still, with a tinge of green upon the cheese-like face.

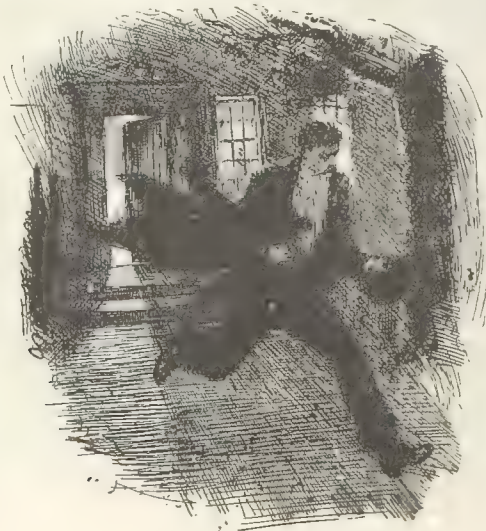
"Who was it who hid the ace in the artillery card-room at Peshawur? Who was it who was broke in consequence? Who was it——?"

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Esdaile. "What nonsense is this? The machine is out of order. Stop it, Rupert. These are not the Professor's remarks. But, dear me, where is our friend Captain Beesly gone?"

"I am afraid that he is not very well, ma," said Rose. "He rushed out of the room."

"There can't be much the matter," quoth Rupert. "There he goes, cutting down the avenue as fast as his legs will carry him. I do not think, somehow, that we shall see the Captain again. But I must really apologize. I have put in the wrong slips. These, I fancy, are those which belong to Professor Standerton's lecture."

Rose Esdaile has become Rose Stares now, and her husband is one of the most rising scientists in the provinces. No doubt she is proud of his intellect and of his growing fame, but there are times when she still gives a thought to the blue-eyed Captain, and marvels at the strange and sudden manner in which he deserted her.



The Spider's Web.

By Jacques Normand.

AT that time my aunt Herminie, fatherless and motherless, was living in the old Abbey of Mauvoisin, near Corbeil, which was disaffected and had become very national. It was during the Reign of Terror, and she was nearly twenty years old. She was there with two old ladies, Madame Maréchal and Madame Badouillet: the former tall and thin, the latter little, stout, and one-eyed. One evening—but it will be better to let Aunt Herminie tell the tale herself. I fancy I can hear her now, relating this story which excited me so, the story which I was continually asking her to repeat.

The story? You wish me to repeat it once more, my child? Well, it was in *those* days. That evening we were sitting by the fire: Madame Maréchal and I were chatting, Madame Badouillet had fallen asleep. It was about ten o'clock; outside it was windy—blowing hard. Oh! I remember it well. Suddenly, there came a knock at the door.



"SUDDENLY, THERE CAME A KNOCK AT THE DOOR."

I must tell you first of all that a troop of soldiers, about a hundred, had arrived during the day. The officer in command, a big, red-headed fellow, had shown us a paper, an order to billet them. They had taken up their quarters in the chapel, and had passed the day there, eating, drinking, singing, and playing cards. They made a dreadful din. They all calmed down when evening came, and were all sleeping in groups.

You will understand, little one, that it was not very reassuring for three lone women to be near such people. Madame Maréchal's husband was away, Madame Badouillet was a widow, and I an orphan; so we bolted ourselves in the little room on the ground floor which was situated between the high road and the chapel, and that's where we were when the knock came, as I have just told you.

Madame Badouillet woke up with a jump, and we all three looked straight at each other with frightened eyes. A moment passed and there was another knock—louder

this time. We had a good mind to sham deafness, as you may imagine, but joking was dangerous in those days. If you refused hospitality to patriots, you were regarded as a "suspect," as they called it, and then—the guillotine! It was all over with you in no time.

Madame Maréchal began to recite her prayers; Madame Badouillet shook in every limb; besides, I was the youngest, so I ought to open the door.

I found some men at the door, with large hats, making quite a black group on the roadway. They looked harassed, and their boots were covered with dust. My first impulse was to shut the door in their faces, but one of them made a step forward, stretched out his hand, and said, in a low, shaking voice:—

"Shelter, citoyenne; give us shelter for the night. We are dropping with fatigue—have pity upon us!" And these last words were repeated in a murmur by the group of men.

"Who are you?"

"Fugitives—deputies of the Gironde—we are pursued, save us!"

They were Girondins! You will know one day, my child, what that meant. It is enough now for you to know that they were poor fellows flying from Paris, pursued by the Montagnards, that is, by their enemies.

"Wretched men," I replied, "go away! The chapel is full of soldiers. If you come in you are lost!"

They hesitated a moment; then a pale young man, quite a youth, who was leaning upon the arms of two of his comrades, murmured feebly:—

"Walk again! I cannot go a step farther. Go on, comrades; save yourselves, and leave me here. I prefer to die!"

They were brave fellows, those Girondins. They would not hear of abandoning the poor young fellow.

"Is there no other place but the chapel where we could rest for two hours—just for two hours only?" asked the one who had already spoken to me.



"HAVE PITY UPON US!"

"None but this room," I answered, standing a little aside; "and the chapel has no way out but that door (I pointed to the middle door), so the soldiers pass through here to enter or go out. Let them see you, and you are lost!"

Great dejection was apparent in the face of the poor man. I could see it plainly, for it was a clear night and as light as day.

"Adieu, citoyennes," he said, simply. "The district is full of people who are pursuing us. Pray that we may escape them!" Then, turning to his companions, he said in a low voice, "Onward!"

Well, my child, I was quite upset; my heart was rent at the sight of their distress. I understood all that they had suffered, and all they would yet suffer. I looked at their drooping shoulders, at their bruised feet. Certainly, by sending them away I was shielding us three from danger, because in helping them I was making myself their accomplice, and exposing myself and my companions to severe punishment. Yes, I understood all that, put pity conquered prudence; a kind of fever seized me, and just as they were moving away—

"Listen," I whispered to them; "there might perhaps be a way to help you, but it would be very risky, very daring."

They drew near eagerly, anxiously, with heads bent forward. Behind me I could hear the trembling voices of Madame Badouillet and Madame Maréchal as they whispered to each other. "What is she talking about? What is she saying?" But that mattered little to me.

"At the other end of the chapel, above the altar," I continued, "there is a granary for storing fodder. Once there, you would be all right; but to get there—"

"Speak, speak!"

"You would have to follow a narrow passage, a sort of

overhanging cornice, the whole length of the wall—and just over the sleeping soldiers. If they hear the least noise, should one of them wake up——!"

"Who will lead us?"

"I will!"

I have already told you, my child, that I was in a fever, that I was no longer master of myself; I was acting as if in a dream. To save them had become my sole aim. They took counsel briefly among themselves, while Madame Badouillet continually pulled at my skirts and called me mad. Oh! I remember it all as if I were going through it now!

"Thanks, citoyenne, for your devotion. We will accept the offer!"

I left the door and they entered noiselessly, on tip-toe. There were about a dozen; their clothes were torn and their fatigue was extreme. I told my two companions to keep watch at the door of the chapel, and turned at once to the fugitives.

"You see those steps leading to the ledge?" I asked them. "Well, I am going to ascend them. When I reach the top I will open the door and look into the interior of the chapel, and if the moment is favourable I will give you a sign. You will then ascend and follow me along the wall to the granary. Once there—if God allows us to get there!—you will rest yourselves. I will come to you when the soldiers are gone—they ought to leave at daybreak. You understand?"

All this was uttered rapidly in a low voice; then, positively, I felt as if I were lifted from the ground, as if impelled by some superior will. I felt deep commiseration for these men, unknown to me only a few minutes before; I felt a protecting sentiment towards them which elated me. To save them I would have thrown myself in front of the cannon's mouth, or have rushed upon the bayonet's point. And I, mite that I was, seemed suddenly endowed with extraordinary strength and energy. Madame Badouillet was right: I was positively mad.

I mounted the stairs, opened the door just a little, and looked in. The soldiers were asleep in groups, their heads resting on their knapsacks, their forms making dark spots on the white stones of the chapel. Occasionally one would turn over with a grunt. A slight murmur of breathing came from this human mass. In the corners the guns were stacked; outside, the wind howled in fury. A ray of light from the moon shone through a side window, lighting up one side of the nave, while the other side—luckily, the side where the ledge was—remained quite dark. To get to the door of the granary—dimly visible, like a dark spot, along the narrow ledge against the wall, at about twenty feet from the sleepers—would be the work of a few seconds in reality, yet these few seconds would seem an age.

And now came the reaction; the excitement of the first few minutes was over, and a dreadful feeling of depression came over me as I saw myself face to face with the reality, and understood the almost childish temerity of my plan. I was seized with a mad desire to tell the Girondins that it was impossible to do it; that the soldiers were waking up; that they must fly at once. Then I became ashamed of my cowardice, and, turning towards the men who were watching me from below with uneasy glances, I gave the sign to ascend.

They obeyed, and the first one was soon by my side. I made a sign to keep silence—a if they needed it, poor men!—then I stepped upon the ledge.

What a journey it was! I shall never forget it. I can feel myself now, moving forward on tip-toe, my left hand lightly touching the cold wall, my right hand in space, fearing every instant to lose my balance, or to knock against some stone, some little heap of dirt and pieces of wall, the falling of which would have roused the soldiers who were sleeping below so close to us. And behind me I can still feel the dumb presence of those creatures who were following me, risking their life with mine. We glided along the ledge like a troop of sleep-

went all over the chapel, and sent an icy chill through me.

"What's the matter up there?" growled a soldier, with an oath.

I stood up straight, all of a shake, and I perceived the fugitives, pale, motionless, and standing as closely as possible to the wall. It seemed as if our last hour had come. Luckily, it was very windy, as I have said, and at that very instant a strong gust shook the roof of the chapel.

"Go to sleep, and rest easy, you great fool! It's the wind!" answered another voice.

The first soldier listened again for a brief space, then



"WE GLIDED ALONG THE LEDGE."

walkers, holding our breath, treading with extraordinary carefulness, the eyes of each one fixed upon the one who preceded him, all making with beating hearts for that little door which grew larger as we approached it—and it was I who was leading them!

Having reached this exciting point, Aunt Ninie stopped and looked at me to judge the effect. She ought to have been pleased, for I was sitting on the edge of my chair, my eyes out of my head, with open mouth, listening with never-failing interest to a story which I had heard so many times.

"What then?" I asked.

At length, after a few minutes, terribly long minutes they seemed, I reached the goal. I seized the key which was still in the door, turned it, pushed the door—and then I thought we were lost!

Nobody had had occasion to go to the granary for a long time, so that the hinges had become rusty; and as I pushed it open it gave out a creaking sound, which

stretched himself, and went to sleep. We were saved—at least for the moment.

The door was only half open, but it was enough to enable us to squeeze in. This I did when silence was completely restored below, and the others followed one by one, easily enough generally, without being obliged to open the door any further. This was very important, for another creak would certainly have done for us.

You cannot imagine the joy and gratitude of those men when once they were all gathered in the granary. They wept, went down on their knees, and kissed the hem of my dress. One would have thought that I had finally saved them; but, alas! the danger was still there, terrible and threatening.

"Rest," I said to them; "stretch yourselves upon the straw. Here you are fairly safe—for the time being, at least. As soon as they are gone you will have nothing more to fear, and you can go away in your turn. Now rest yourselves and sleep, and count on me if any new danger menaces you."



"HE ENTERED, FOLLOWED BY TWO HUSSARS."

I left them and passed through the door, leaving it as it was. Of course, it would have been better to shut it, but that was impossible on account of the noise it would have made.

My return journey along the ledge was performed without incident. Alone, I felt lighter, more skilful, and slipped along like a mouse. At the end of a few seconds I was back in the room, where the two ladies anxiously awaited me.

Each one received me in a different way. Madame Maréchal, severe and sharp, reproached me cruelly, saying that *that* was not the way to behave: it was risking my life and theirs—that I ought to have left them outside—that I was a fool, etc. Madame Badouillet, on the contrary, approved what I had done, and defended me, saying that nobody could reject the prayer of the fugitives—it would have been infamous. And this good woman pressed me to her heart, and, pleased to see me back again, kissed me, while she wiped away the tears from her one eye.

So we sat down again, commenting in a low voice upon the unforeseen and terrible events which had come upon our hitherto peaceful existence. And it was really a dreadful situation. All these men, enemies, so near to each other; what might happen if the fugitives were discovered? It was frightful, so much so that Madame Maréchal proposed that we should run away, out in the night, across the fields to Corbeil, leaving the men to settle matters amongst themselves as best they could—that was her expression. Madame Badouillet and I rejected this proposal with indignation, and we remained there whispering to each other, and longed for the end of this interminable night.

The first streaks of dawn began to appear, and we felt within reach of the moment when our anxiety would end. Suddenly we heard the gallop of horses on the roadway. What now? We listened. The horses stopped, and we heard a noise of voices. Everybody seemed to be paying us a visit that night.

Then came a knock as before; and, as before, it was I who opened the door. There was a man before me, surrounded by several hussars who had dismounted.

"They are here, eh, citoyenne?" asked the man, who was not a soldier, but doubtless some Government agent. He was stout, and appeared out of breath through having come so rapidly.

I started, but soon recovered my *sang-froid*.

"Here! Who?"

"You know well enough. Those rascally Girondins!"

"There is nobody here but the soldiers who arrived yesterday, as you probably know."

"That's what we intend to find out."

He motioned to one of the men to hold his horse, and dismounted, painfully giving a grunt of satisfaction when he reached the ground. He was certainly not accustomed to that sort of exercise. He was attired in black, with big boots, and feathers in his hat. His round, white face seemed good-natured at first sight, but the look of his little sunken eyes was false and cruel.

He entered, followed by two hussars, and went straight towards the chapel. As soon as he was perceived, there was a great stir; the mass of soldiers began to

move with a noise of swords and guns upon the stones, and everybody was soon on foot. The officer in charge came forward and saluted the new-comer, and we understood that this fat man was an important personage.

A conversation in a low voice took place between them. Standing near the door, we tried our hardest to hear what was said, but in vain; we could only guess from the gestures that the agent was interrogating the captain, and that the latter was replying in the negative. We feared to see them raise their heads and perceive the half-opened door above. This little door seemed enormous now, as if everybody must see it.

However, it was not so, for the agent, finishing his



"A CONVERSATION TOOK PLACE BETWEEN THEM."

conversation with the captain, came up to me, and with that cunning look which boded no good, he said, "So you are quite sure, citizenne, that there is nobody here but these men?"

He pointed to the soldiers, who were about to brush themselves and put themselves in order. I looked him in the face and replied, "Nobody!"

He put the same question to Madame Badouillet, who bravely made the same reply. Then it was Madame Maréchal's turn. I thought she was going to betray us, and I gave her a fierce look. She hesitated a moment; then, with her eyes on the ground, she stammered, "I do not know—I have been asleep—I have heard nothing."

"Well, I know more about it than *you*," said the agent.

"Since you doubt us, citizen, search the place. I will lead you wherever you like."

He hesitated, thrown off the scent by my effrontery, and I thought he was going to give up all idea of pursuit, when a voice cried, "It is my opinion that if any little plot has been contrived, it has been done up there."

A soldier, doubtless the one who had woke up in the night, pointed with an evil look to the ledge and the granary door. All eyes were raised, and my legs trembled under me. I thought of the unfortunate men who were behind that door, without weapons, without any possible means of defence, listening to what was said. I cursed myself for having yielded to their prayer, and having sheltered them. Outside they would have



"LOOK! SPIDERS' WEBS!"

"Some peasants have assured me that the Girondins came in here, that they have passed the night here, and that they are here still. Is it true?"

We all were silent.

"Now just think well about it, citizennes. You know what you are exposing yourselves to by hiding these traitors?"

It was terrifying to be thus questioned in the midst of men who were watching us closely, and whose looks seemed to pierce our very souls. I felt that Madame Maréchal was giving way, that all was lost. Her lips moved, she was about to speak. I did not give her the time to do so, and putting a bold face on the matter, I replied:—

been in just as great danger, but it would not have been my fault. They could have fought, run away, anything; but there they were through my fault! It was horrible, and I thought I should go mad.

After questioning the soldier—oh, I could have killed him, the wretch!—the agent turned towards me.

"Well, citizenne, as you propose it, you shall act as our guide. Lead us to that door up there; it's a granary, I suppose?"

I nodded. I could not speak, my throat was too dry.

"A few men follow me! On!"

That was a most terrible moment, my child. I had to summon all my strength to keep from swooning. I drew myself up, however, and went towards the staircase

which led to the ledge, that staircase which I had ascended with the fugitives a few hours before. The agent came next, followed by several soldiers.

What could I hope for in obeying the order? It would require a miracle to save the Girondins. But I had fought it out to that point, and I would fight it out to the end. And, frankly speaking, I scarcely knew what I was doing; I was acting unconsciously—I had been told to go there, and I was going, that's all!

I soon reached the ledge, the agent following painfully on account of his corpulence. He seemed, moreover, very clumsy, and his fat body embarrassed him much. When he reached the top of the staircase and saw the ledge, on which I had already advanced a step or two, he hesitated.

"Oh! oh! it is very narrow!" he murmured.

Then he saw that all the soldiers were looking at him from below, and, stung by their looks, he followed me slowly, supporting himself against the wall, stepping with infinite caution. Really, if the situation had not been so dreadful it would have been grotesque.

Two questions swam in my head. What should I do? Should I run rapidly forward and join the unfortunate men and die with them? Or should I throw myself down on the stones and kill myself?

Still, I went on slowly, slowly, expecting every minute to see the door shut by the poor fellows as a frail and useless obstacle to a certain capture; and I was so interested in their fate that I forgot my own danger.

We had reached the centre of the ledge when suddenly the agent stopped, and, turning towards those who followed, said: "Look! spiders' webs!" and he pointed to the entrance of the granary.

And, in fact, by a providential chance, a large spider's web, torn when I opened the door, had remained hanging on the woodwork: and the insect

had, during the few hours of the night, partly repaired the damage. The fresh threads crossed the whole space of the opening, and nobody could imagine for a moment that men had passed through that space that very night without breaking the whole of the web. Yes, my child, a spider, a simple spider, had done it. But one cannot help thinking that the good God had something to do with it.

"It is useless to go further," said the agent.

Between you and me I believe the fat fellow was not sorry at heart, for he was dreadfully afraid of rolling down below, and pride alone had sustained him.

There is little need to say more. The Girondins were saved, and I with them. The agent went off, followed by his hussars; and the other soldiers marched away soon afterwards.

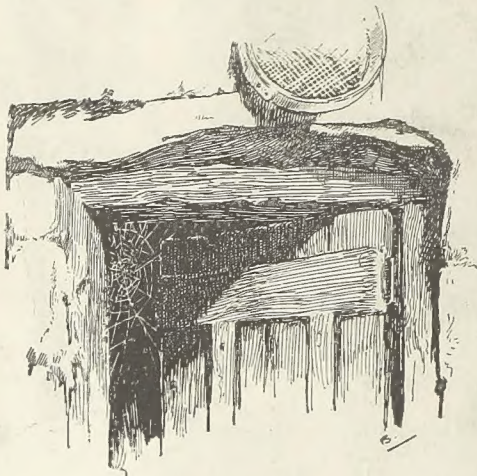
As soon as the chapel was empty I ran to the granary. It is not necessary to tell you with what protestations of gratitude I was received. One second more, and, as I had expected, they would have shut the door, which would have been fatal; but Providence willed it otherwise.

We gave them something to eat, and they remained all day with us; for it would have been imprudent to have left before night. When night came they left us, after having thanked me much more than I deserved. I had done my duty—nothing more.

We followed them with our eyes upon the road as long as we could. Then they disappeared in the darkness.

Did they escape? Were they discovered, and killed on their way? I have never heard. But I have rejoiced all my life that I, delicate as I am, was able to go through so much without breaking down. Madame Badouillet and Madame Maréchal were both ill afterwards.

And that is my story



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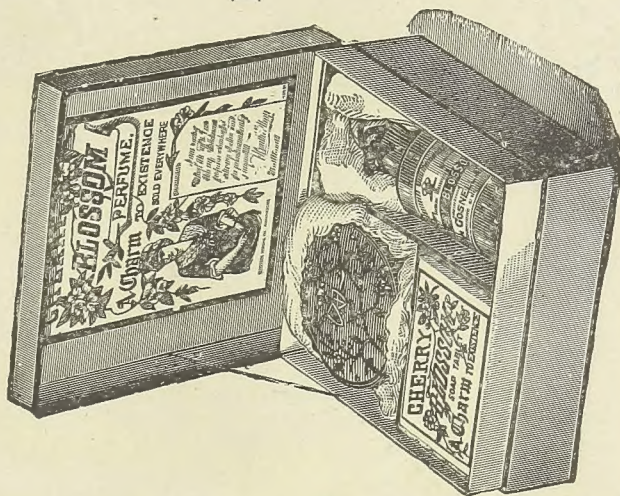
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was a melancholy soul.

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And called for his doctors three.

Old King Cole

shook his royal old poll—

for the doctors could n't agree.

It's getting rather rough—

You can't swallow your own stuff.

And I'll try another tack," cried he.

Said Old King Cole.

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Then Old King Cole
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and laughed at his doctors three
He paid their little bills—
but he stuck to Beecham's Pills
Like the folks
of his Good countree.